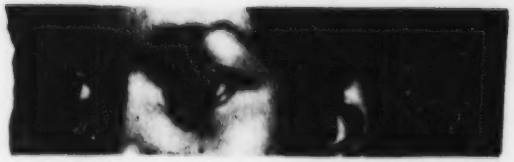
Looking to the Future



Report of the Metro Youth Task Force
The Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto

Spring 1991

91-06381/

WE, THE MEMBERS OF THE YOUTH TASK FORCE, ARE PLEASED TO PRESENT OUR REPORT, **LOOKING TO THE FUTURE**, to Metro Council and to the community.

We have determinedly carried out our mandate to get "behind the headlines" and investigate the key issues facing youth in Metro. While **Looking to the Future** represents the end of the Task Force's work, we see our Report as the basis for beginning a process that ensures youth have a greater voice in the decisions that affect their lives. Moreover, our plan challenges those funding or providing services to youth to reassess their priorities and establish new commitments.

Early on, we decided that to get behind the headlines the Task Force had to talk with and listen to Metro's youth. In community meetings held all over Metro, we met with young people, as well as parents, community members, and a wide array of service providers. We also held a series of ethno-specific consultation meetings to ensure that the views of youth from diverse backgrounds would be heard. People told us about the problems facing youth, but we also heard about the many valuable contributions youth make to our community. A special thanks to all of those who met with us, shared their views and ideas and suggested options for change. A record of the proceedings of our various consultations is available in an appendix.

What we heard in our meetings convinced us that we needed to clearly affirm a set of basic rights for youth – rights to a voice, a role and access to opportunities and services. It is these basic rights, and the responsibilities that go along with them, that underlie the recommendations set out in the Action Plan. We believe these recommendations will give youth more opportunity to participate meaningfully in the resolution of social issues they face.

Finally, we hope that **Looking to the Future** will serve as a framework for establishing broad directions in a number of areas. At the same time, we believe that the many concrete recommendations in the Report will have an immediate impact by improving the way services are planned and delivered.

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June, 1991

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SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

Section 1: The Introduction contains background information about the current social landscape, why the Task Force was formed, its mandate and the way it carried out its mandate.

Section 2: The Findings section presents summaries of comments made by people during the community consultations and gives statistical information to provide a context for those comments and concerns. As well, the section on Getting Services in Metro sketches in some of the main problems faced by youth who need help from those in the human services field.

Section 3: This section contains a list of Basic Rights and Responsibilities of youth.

Section 4: The Key Issues and Recommendations section outlines the main areas of concern and the Action Plan proposed to deal with them.

Section 5: The section What Happens Next summarizes the report's main recommendations and talks about the steps that must be taken to implement them.

1.1. A GUIDE TO READING THIS REPORT

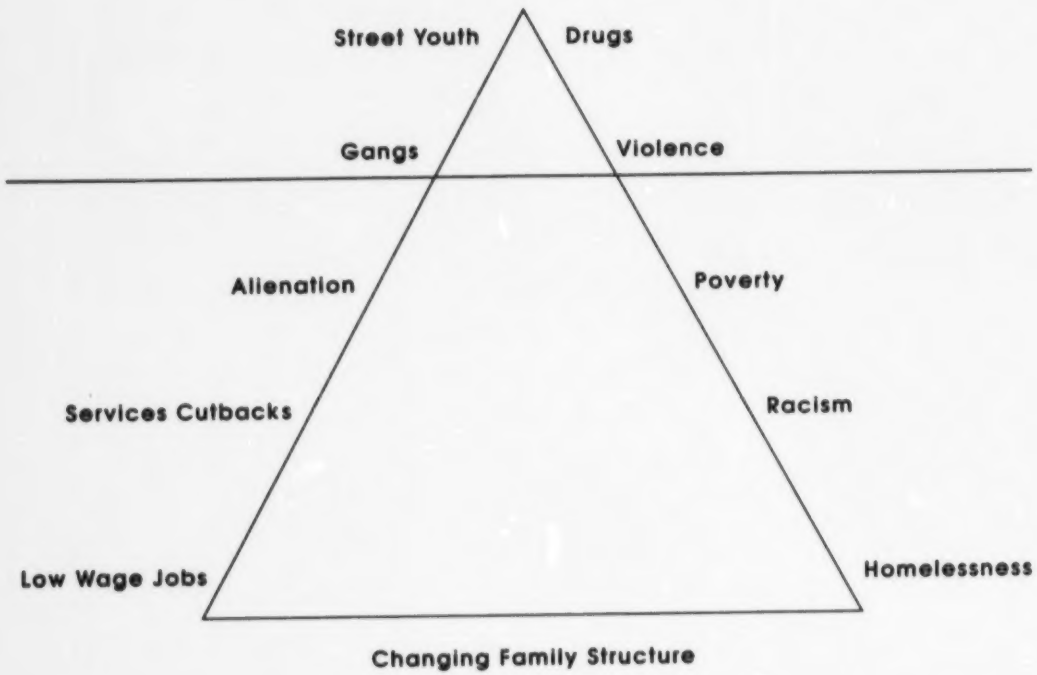
1.2. THE SOCIAL CONTEXT

WHAT'S IT LIKE BEING A YOUNG PERSON IN METRO TORONTO TODAY? Is it really any different than trying to navigate the rapids of adolescence thirty years ago? What kind of future do youth in the 1990's foresee for themselves?

It depends to some extent on where you sit and who you are. Adolescence may still be the same period of turmoil, excitement and upheaval that many adults can remember having lived through, but it plays itself out today against a social landscape that is very different from what it was even two decades ago.

ADDRESSING YOUTH ISSUES

LOOKING BENEATH THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG



For one thing, the people who make up this city are an increasingly diverse group. Many were born here and many chose to come from somewhere else, bringing with them their own histories, cultures and expectations. Native, immigrant, refugee and visible minority youth often come up against social, economic and cultural barriers that limit their choices about possible futures. For many of these young people, the generation gap that usually divides parents and children during this stage of life is further complicated by a culture gap, as family members clash over what it means to be a young person in Metro.

All youth in Metro Toronto share the fact that, as a group, they form an increasingly smaller percentage of the total population. This means that as the youth population declines and the "baby boomers" age, social and economic resources keep being shifted to meet emerging needs, such as those of the rapidly growing group of senior citizens. These policy decisions mean that there's less money available to fund programs and services for youth.

There may be fewer young people around but it seems as though societal problems affecting youth – gangs, drugs, street kids, violence – are increasingly visible, at least in the media.

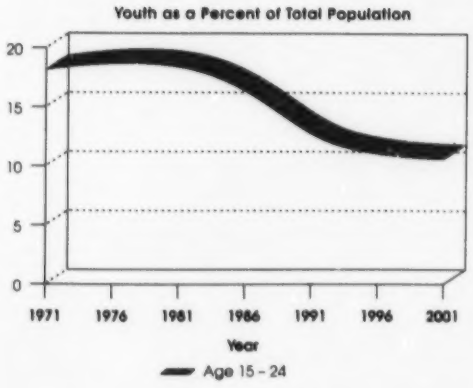
Many young people may weather this stage without undue distress, and obviously much can be learned from the way

they manage. But what about the ones who don't, the ones who have the spotlight turned on them? Their behaviour is certainly dramatic and makes for catchy headlines. But what about trying to scratch under the surface? Maybe then we will be able to learn something about the underlying causes of this behaviour.

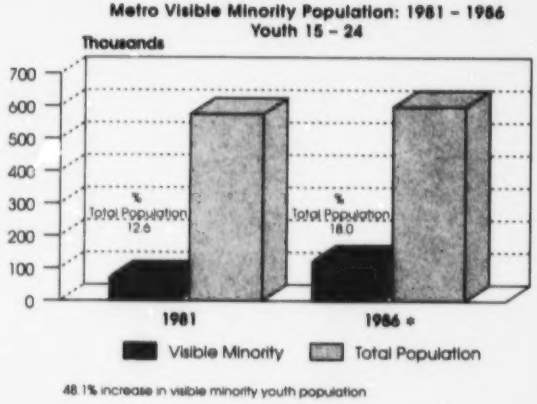
Our youth have inherited pressing economic and environmental problems. Many have diminished expectations; few expect to live as well as their parents. They must face these problems without many of the traditional supports which young people often took for granted in years gone by. The make-up of the family has changed and neighbourhoods are not as cohesive as before. With too few recreation facilities available, young people are forced to congregate in apartment buildings and malls.

Even simple pleasures can cost a lot these days in a place as expensive as Metro Toronto. Meanwhile, the mass media shows images of the "good life", built on a foundation of wealth and success which few of us can ever hope to attain. As the gap between rich and poor widens in Metro, a significant number of youth are falling through the cracks. Those who do, tend to fall hard.

Perhaps a question we might all consider is the one which guided the work of the Metro Youth Task Force: How can we best use scarce resources to meet the truly pressing needs and issues facing our young people, especially those young people who are disadvantaged and sometimes forgotten?



Source: Metro Toronto Statistical Series: Projections, 1989. Metro Toronto Planning Department.



Source: Employment Equity Availability Data, 1989. Employment and Immigration Canada.

* most recent census data available

1.3. WHY A YOUTH TASK FORCE, ANYHOW?

HEADLINES ABOUT YOUTH THESE PAST FEW YEARS HAVE BEEN DRAMATIC AND WORRISOME: Violence in malls and schools, drugs, gangs, street kids, swarmings. But how do we get to the stories behind the headlines? Is violence on the rise? Why? What, exactly, are gangs anyway and how widespread are they in Metro Toronto?

The push to learn more about these and other issues prompted Metro Council to form the Metro Youth Task Force. There were other reasons as well:

- there are cutbacks in funding to the few federal or provincial government programs focusing on youth these days
- changing social conditions have placed great pressures on youth but the social safety net, such as welfare and funding for youth shelters, has not kept pace with these changes
- within the range of policies and programs dealing with youth, more attention needs to be paid to the problems unique to people at this stage of life
- youth problems have to be dealt with in as broad a way as possible. To do so requires input from those involved in child welfare, education, social services, employment, race relations, recreation, law enforcement, mental health, planning, government and community-based funders, community members, parents and, of course, youth themselves.

Accordingly, in April 1989, Metro Toronto Council created the Youth Task Force to examine key issues affecting youth in the community and to make appropriate recommendations.

1.4. TASK FORCE MAKE-UP AND MANDATE

Chaired by Councillor Brian Ashton, the Task Force included representatives from schools boards, youth service agencies, child welfare organizations, diverse racial and ethnic groups, the police force and the business community. The aim was to have a mix of front-line people, who dealt directly with youth, and those in administrative and policy positions. Trying to get geographic representation from across Metro Toronto was another factor in the choice of Task Force members.

The Task Force was unsure about how best to select a few young people who would adequately represent the diversity of Metro's youth population. They decided to set up a broad-based consultation system that would allow for input from many different youth and to look for a mechanism that would actively involve young people at a later stage in the process.

The Task Force's mandate was to:

- develop a clear and comprehensive understanding of the nature and scope of problems facing youth in Metro today
- prepare an action plan in response to identified needs and issues, highlighting specific recommendations and outlining resource requirements and policy changes needed for their implementation.

What Does "Youth" Mean?

In order to carry out their mandate, Task Force members felt they needed to reach agreement about what the term "youth" meant. For the United Nations, youth is the stage of life between the ages of 15 and 24. However, the Task Force felt that age-related definitions might be too narrow. Instead, they chose to describe youth as the transitional period between the dependencies of childhood and the responsibilities of adulthood.

This life stage is usually one of relative freedom and independence and can involve considerable experimentation, as well as major physical and emotional changes. For some, youth can begin as early as 10 years of age, while for others, this period might continue on well into their mid-twenties.

1.5. WHAT THE YOUTH TASK FORCE DID

The Task Force carried out its work in three basic stages.

STAGE 1: Information Gathering

The initial stage of data collecting involved a two-pronged approach. Existing reports, studies and statistics from Canada and abroad were reviewed and summarized to provide a context for Task Force discussions.

Besides searching through the literature, The Task Force went directly to the community to find out what people – particularly young people – in Metro thought about youth needs, issues and problems. What seemed to them the most critical areas?

From January to December, 1990, twenty-five consultation meetings were held right across Metro with youth, parents, community members, educators and social service workers. The groups surveyed were as varied as possible. The young people, for instance, included "street kids", ethnic and racial minority youth, students, and youth who work full time. All views expressed at the consultations were thoroughly documented and then summarized. Section 2: The Findings presents these summaries and includes a fuller description of the whys and hows of the consultation process. For those who want to delve deeper, the complete proceedings from each meeting are available in an Appendix to this report.

STAGE 2: THE FINDINGS: Analysis and Synthesis of Information

Once a pool of information had been collected from research material and the consultation meetings, Task Force members worked to identify the underlying themes and key issues which kept reappearing. In many cases, these key issues, often mentioned during the consultations, formed the basis for the recommendations that were to follow. As well, the Task Force formulated a set of guiding principles, the Basic Rights and Responsibilities of Youth. These principles, which also emerged from people's comments during the meetings, helped clarify what recommendations were needed to try and make these Rights and Responsibilities a reality.

STAGE 3: An Action Plan

To deal with the key issues and problems, the Task Force is proposing a series of strategies and recommendations which are outlined in the final section. Most important of all, these proposals establish directions for Metro itself as a policy maker, funder, program initiator and service provider. Also, this Action Plan is meant to provide a basis for parents, educators, politicians, police, government policy planners, community members and especially, youth to work together to meet youth needs in as comprehensive and creative a way as possible.

SECTION 2: THE FINDINGS

2.1. TAKING THE PULSE: THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

How does a Youth Task Force find out what concerns youth most these days? Or discover what services and programs they might need? By talking with the groups most intimately involved – youth themselves and those connected with them. To hear from these people, 25 meetings were held across Metro between January and December 1990.

The diverse group of youth consulted included "street youth", students, youth working full-time, immigrant and visible minority youth. Meetings were also arranged with parents, educators and service workers. The Task Force tried to gather groups that, as a whole, reflected the broad range of youth interests and socio-economic and ethno-racial backgrounds. To do so, they contacted youth service organizations, schools, ethnic and racial organizations, existing youth networks, and race relations committees. In addition, special consultation meetings were held with Native, black and Vietnamese youth.

The Task Force preferred to have group participants raise the issues that seemed most pressing to them, rather than organizing meetings in advance around specific "problems" – such as gangs and violence. However, several small groups were also formed to discuss specific topics like education, employment, family, violence, race relations and lifestyles. These broadly representative groups involved a total of 55 youth who met twice to discuss these issues.

The following pages summarize what mattered most to all those we consulted. Usually, their comments are preceded by some information, statistical or otherwise, which helps to provide a wider context for the statements which follow. Individual reports of the various consultations are available in an appendix.

In this section we will discuss the following issues:

- Family
- Education
- Employment/Income
- Housing
- Services
- Recreation
- Substance Abuse
- Violence
- Gangs
- Law Enforcement
- Racism
- Mass Media
- Youth Involvement
- General Concerns

FAMILY

OVER THE PAST FEW DECADES, CHANGES IN FAMILY STRUCTURE HAVE AFFECTED NEARLY EVERYONE IN OUR SOCIETY. Some of the most striking changes have to do with the rapid increase in single-parent families and families where both parents work outside the home.

In Metro Toronto over the past 10 years, there has been a 40% increase in the number of single-parent families. Eighty-five per cent of single-parent families are headed by women; half of these families live below the poverty line.

According to Statistics Canada over the past 20 years, there has been a 28% increase in the number of "husband-wife families" where both partners earn income by working outside the home. Two-thirds of these double-income families have children.

The family circle is changing rapidly and changes in the nature of this circle can have considerable influence on youth.

"Complete strangers can be your own blood."

- People noted that societal pressures are causing more family conflict and family breakdown. These mean greater stresses for children and youth and an increased need for support from outside the family
- Regardless of class, ethnic or racial background, youth made similar comments about the family:
  - generally, parents are boring
  - they don't understand their kids and the changes they're going through
  - they're too controlling
  - they try to prevent their kids from making the same mistakes they did

  Despite these views, many youth stated that their parents don't spend enough time with them. The range of comments expressed, while often contradictory, point out the difficulties of parenting today
- Almost all youth said that it's easier to talk to friends than parents
- Some people pointed out that TV's portrayal of the perfect family is unrealistic. Family conflict is never shown, or else it is neatly resolved within a half hour
- Many participants seemed to have experienced family violence, either directly or indirectly, though they generally did not discuss such personal matters during the consultation sessions
- Despite all the conflicts and difficulties mentioned, youth felt that families were very important for providing a sense of direction, keeping youth company and offering help and support
- Parents commented on their children's reluctance to share issues and experiences with them. A number described extensive efforts to stay in touch with their kids
- Both youth and adults noted the wide range in parents' attitudes towards discipline, from very strict to very permissive.

EDUCATION

THE MAKE-UP OF THE STUDENT POPULATION IN METRO TORONTO HIGH SCHOOLS closely reflects changing patterns of immigration. For instance, in the City of Toronto between 1980 and 1987, the percentage of students born in Asia almost doubled, while the percentage born in Europe fell drastically.

In Ontario in 1986, almost 75% of all 18-year-olds had graduated from high school. In 1956, the rate was roughly 30%. Though the increase is significant, one out of every four teenage students in Ontario still doesn't finish secondary school. The drop-out rate in the basic vocational stream is 79%; in the advanced stream, it is 12%. Increasingly, higher levels of education are needed for the job market.

Concern is rising over the high incidence of illiteracy among high school drop-outs and graduates. A 1987 study conducted by Southam among young Canadians aged 21-25 found that almost 25% were high school drop-outs. Among the drop-outs, more than one in five was functionally illiterate. *

- Education issues were mentioned in all sessions
- Adults and youth saw these issues differently. The same was true for youth from different backgrounds
- Many people stressed the need to approach youth issues in a holistic way. They saw the school as an essential part of a continuum of youth programs and services
- Educators pointed out the restrictions of mandate and funding which limit the schools' ability to be all things to all people
- Parents and service workers wanted better communication and stronger linkages between schools, students, parents and agencies
- Schools were often criticized by students, parents and service workers for trying to make students fit into a rigid system, rather than developing a more flexible approach to meet individual needs
- As some people pointed out, few choices exist for youth who don't fit into the regular school system – for example, teenage parents, youth in group or foster homes, working youth
- Streaming is a controversial issue. Educators differ on the significance of streaming, and its impact on students, reflecting the varied schools of thought that exist within the educational community. However, many youth and adult participants were concerned about the negative effects of streaming
- Youth and adults stated that schools don't prepare youth for the "real world". They asked for more emphasis in schools on life skills, job training and so forth

"When it comes down to it, it is more important to eat and have a place to sleep than it is to go to school."

* Broken Words: Why Five Million Canadians are Illiterate, A Special Southam Survey, 1987.

EDUCATION
(CONT'D)

"There are lot's of jobs that want experience, not just school credits."

- It was generally felt that failure at school sets people up for a life of failure
- According to participants, drop-outs who want to go back to school need more information about how to do so
- There was a range of comments regarding teachers:
  - teachers should not stereotype students
  - teachers must respect confidentiality
  - teachers should show more understanding and awareness, particularly of other cultures
  - teachers should respect students as people
  - a lower student/teacher ratio is needed to improve teacher/student relationships
- Many people felt that teachers and the school system need to be more involved with immigrant parents and could offer more help and support
- Teachers and the school system should show more sensitivity and flexibility when dealing with immigrant students who face:
  - difficulty understanding curriculum information
  - fear of being laughed at by peers and misunderstood by teachers because of language difficulties
  - non-recognition of intelligence and skills due to communication barriers
  - difficulty making friends in a new culture
- More counselling services are needed to address student problems at home, with friends and in school
- School buildings should be more readily available for extracurricular and community use.

EMPLOYMENT/INCOME

THE ECONOMIC PICTURE FOR YOUTH IS FAR FROM ROSY. In Metro Toronto in 1986, unemployment rates for 15-24 year-olds were twice as high as for the total work force. Today the proportion would be at least as high if not higher.

Visible minority youth are in an even worse situation. In 1986, their rates of unemployment were 30% higher than the rest of the youth population (Employment Equity Availability Data, Employment and Immigration Canada, 1986).

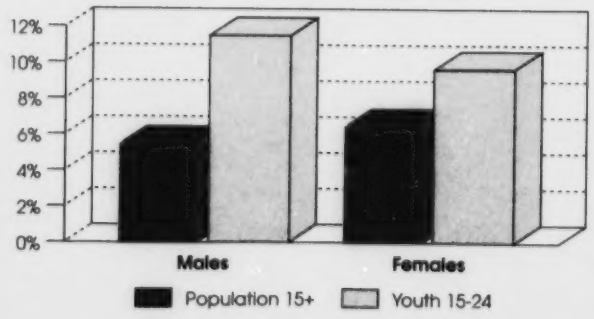
Youth are especially affected by the general trend towards more part-time rather than full-time jobs. Between 1981 and 1986, the largest increase in the number of youth employed was in the low-paying service sector – banks, shoe stores, fast food outlets. In such "dead-end" jobs, the wages are low, with little opportunity for skills training or advancement.

In terms of purchasing power, youth incomes are only now reaching 1981 (pre-recession) levels. Earnings remain low. Although the hourly minimum wage in Ontario is $5.40 (as of October, 1990), for students under 18 the minimum wage is pegged at $4.55 per hour. The financial situation for visible minority youth in Metro is even bleaker: on average, they earn 79% of what their white counterparts do (Unpublished Data, Census of Canada, 1986. Statistics Cananda).

According to the Canadian Council on Social Development, the poorest age group in Canada consists of people 16-24.

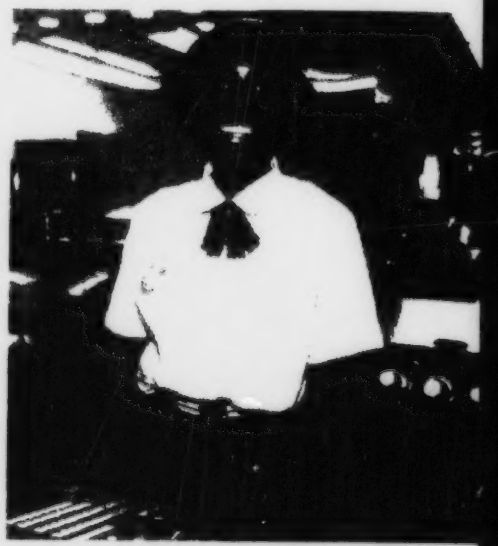
- Adults expressed concern about the prospects for youth living in Metro Toronto. The high cost of living, deep recession, high school drop-out rates and drugs were often cited as reasons for the concern
- With the exception of youth from fairly well-off families, most youth have low expectations of ever being able to live well in Metro
- Many youth are worried about finding employment or being stuck in minimum wage jobs. They also noted difficulties in enrolling in training programs but felt they were useful for those who did get in. Others questioned the relevance of school for the job market
- Youth without parental support (specifically, homeless youth and those who are wards of Children's Aid) find it especially hard to juggle work and school. At the very least, they have to work long hours after school which affects their school performance.

Metro Unemployment Rates: 1986
Youth vs Population 15+



Source: Employment Equity Availability Data, 1989. Employment and Immigration Canada.

"You can't get a job if you don't have a home because you can't receive phone calls, you can't put an address down on an application form, you can't..... you can't.....



HOUSING

HOUSING IN METRO TORONTO IS BOTH HARD TO COME BY AND EXPENSIVE. It's not surprising, then, that youth living on their own have a particularly hard time finding adequate shelter.

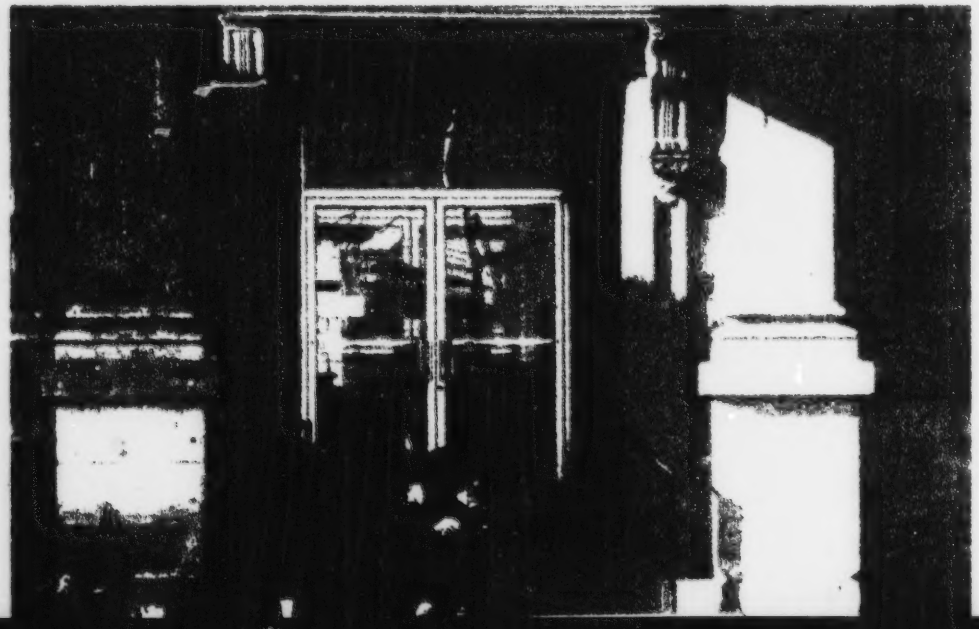
In October 1990, the average rent for a one-bedroom apartment in Metro Toronto was $559; two-bedroom units cost $689. However, the more affordable units are very hard to find.

As of October 1990, the vacancy rate for rental units in the Toronto area had risen to a decade-high rate of 1%. That means that 10 out of every 1000 rental apartments were available. Six months before, the vacancy rate was 0.7%.

10,000 people were on the waiting list for Metro Housing in August 1990. Since youth normally can't even get on the waiting list until they are 16, they are not likely to get in until at least 18 years of age.

As of September 1989, Metro Toronto had only 227 emergency beds in youth shelters. This is woefully inadequate.

"Low cost housing is always in unsafe areas or else it's filthy!"



- For youth who are not living in a family situation, access to affordable housing is a major issue. Many "runaway" or "throwaway" youth find that living on the street is their only option
- The cost of housing in Metro Toronto prevents youth from moving out on their own, which slows down their move towards independence
- Many youth felt that they were discriminated against when they tried to find housing
- Youth with special needs – visible minority youth, welfare recipients, people with disabilities, refugees, youth with AIDS – are doubly disadvantaged
- There is a great need for emergency shelter for youth – particularly in the suburbs – as well as for permanent, affordable housing designed with youth in mind
- Some youth workers advocated reserving a certain number of units in public housing projects for youth.

SERVICES

SOME PARTICIPANTS SUGGESTED THAT THE BREAKDOWN OF extended families, and the growth of two-income and single-parent families had resulted in a greater need for services. Others felt that "looking to the family" was not necessarily the best way to solve youth problems.

People stressed the existence of gaps and overlaps in the service system. They felt that information about services needs to be better co-ordinated and more widely available.

Certain key areas require expansion:

- services for 16-24-year-olds
- shelters, particularly for abused youth
- services in the suburbs
- dental services
- mental health services within a comfortable, drop-in setting
- enhanced allowances for youth receiving welfare and Ontario Student Assistance loans
- affordable housing for youth
- drug rehabilitation programs with strong outreach components
- orientation programs for immigrant and refugee youth
- linguistically, culturally and racially sensitive programs and services

- To be successful, services must address the needs of the whole person, rather than dealing with isolated issues
- The service emphasis should include prevention and long-term solutions, not just crisis management
- Youth must be involved in developing services which will most effectively meet their needs
- Drop-in centres for youth are badly needed. Activities and people to talk to should be available in these settings but not imposed
- Programs and services should not be aimed solely at youth with pressing needs. A safety net is important for all youth
- Services in institutional settings are usually inappropriate for youth
- Some co-ordination between welfare and the Ontario Student Assistance Program is needed
- The need for parental signatures – to receive welfare, for instance – should be reconsidered. It is an impossible demand for youth who are no longer in touch with their families or who are trying to leave abusive family situations.

"It's so confusing. They send you here and there, all over the city. Or you have to wait forever. Sometimes you want help but the hassles aren't worth it."

RECREATION

- Many said that a wide variety of programs are needed – not just basketball games. Youth must have a say in designing and running these programs. Young people also need places where they can just "hang out"
- Recreation is a form of prevention – it keeps youth involved and off the street. It is not a luxury
- Both youth and adults strongly stressed the need for more affordable and comfortable recreational facilities geared to youth
- Programs must be accessible, have flexible hours and operate after school.

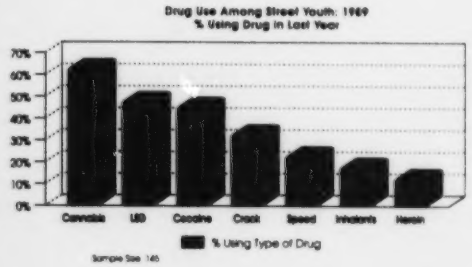
SUBSTANCE ABUSE

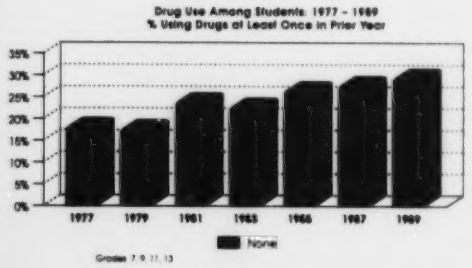
WORRY ABOUT DRUG ABUSE IS WIDESPREAD. However, contrary to popular belief, substance abuse seems to be decreasing among certain parts of the population.

The Addiction Research Foundation conducted an Ontario Student Drug Use Survey between 1977-1989. They found that in 1979, 17% of the students reported using no drugs of any kind (including alcohol and tobacco) during the previous year. In 1989, that number rose to 29%. This same pattern of declining use among students held true for the eight drugs surveyed, with the single exception of alcohol consumption which rose slightly (The Ontario Student Drug Use Survey: Trends Between 1977 – 1989. Toronto: Addiction Research Foundation).

For "street youth", however, drug use is a large – perhaps even inescapable – part of life.

"Drugs and alcohol make you feel like you belong more!"





Source: The Ontario Student Drug Use Survey: Trends Between 1977 – 1989. Toronto: Addiction Research Foundation.

- Adults expressed concern about drug abuse in every consultation session
- Among youth, awareness of drugs as a problem varied, depending upon their previous exposure and the nature of the drug experiences they had
- Most youth said drugs were not a big problem. They told us they were widely available, but not pushed on them
- Youth experiment with drugs for a variety of reasons:
  - recreation
  - curiosity
  - mind expansion
  - as a way to forget problems and get their spirits up (many addicted youth were/are abused)
  - to have a sense of belonging
  - to stay awake
  - to enjoy music more
- Some youth distinguished between occasional use for fun and addiction
- A few youth who had been addicted to drugs noted the difficulties of withdrawal and of "getting your body back together". They also stressed that often one can be addicted without realizing it
- Youth said drinking was a greater social problem than drugs. They also pointed out that, though widely used and abused, alcohol is socially acceptable. Youth feel they receive mixed messages about alcohol, e.g., parental use, TV ads
- Some youth had no use for drug education while others felt it should begin as early as kindergarten. Adults tended to recommend drug education for both youth and adults
- Some people felt that violence and gang activity often happen because of drug use and drug dealing
- Social service workers stressed the need for alternatives to keep youth away from drugs, such as appropriate recreation programs and better paying jobs.

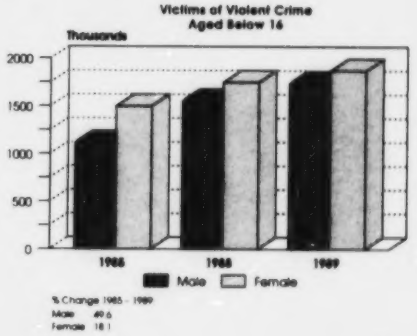
VIOLENCE

BETWEEN 1985-1989, ACCORDING TO METRO TORONTO POLICE STATISTICS, the number of violent crimes against young males under the age of 16 almost doubled, and such crimes against females increased nearly 20%.

Violence is a problem not only on the streets but in the home. Conservative estimates suggest that at least one in ten women suffers physical abuse in her relationship with a man, and in half those cases, the children will be watching. According to recent research findings, the rate of physical abuse against women in Toronto may be as high as one in four.*

Faced with an atmosphere of constant family violence, many kids have no choice but to run for their lives, away from their homes and into the streets. A 1987 Covenant House study of 195 runaway and homeless youth found that 86% of them reported at least one physically abusive experience before running away (Running For Their Lives: Children in Turmoil, 1987. Second Symposium on Street Youth Proceeding, 1987).

- People agreed that our society is becoming more violent: at home, on TV, in schools and in the community
- Violence was defined in a variety of ways:
  - victimization of people, particularly women, immigrants, racial minorities
  - beating people up for no reason (some seemed to suggest that if there's a reason, it's okay)
  - rape, sexual assault
  - emotional or verbal abuse
  - vandalism
  - discipline taken to extremes
- Reasons given for violent behaviour included:
  - a way to get out anger
  - no particular reason; a by-product of boredom
  - because it's always present in the media
  - because there are a lot of "crazy people"
  - to prove you're stronger
  - to be part of certain groups
  - because of violence in the family
- Some youth identified forms of violence acceptable to them:
  - sports
  - organized aggression between equals (for example, "Let's meet at 4:00 in the parking lot")
  - violence for survival
- As with drugs, attitudes towards violence differed, depending on people's exposure to and experience with violent behaviour
- According to many youth, getting weapons is easy. There were differing views about whether having weapons was acceptable. Some feel that carrying a gun or knife is necessary to feel secure in the city, while others believe that doing so perpetuates violence
- Violence against women and children was unacceptable to everybody.



Source: Environment Assessment, 1990. Metro Toronto Police Force.

"Damage to people and property is useless as too often people do it for no reason. However, if violence is used for survival it's a different matter."

* Smith, Michael. "The Incidence and Prevalence of Woman Abuse in Toronto". Violence and Victims, no.2 (1987).

GANGS

WHICH KIDS BELONG TO GANGS? Given the lack of concrete information, it is hard to draw any definite conclusions about them. One study that compared British, American and Canadian youth subcultures did make several interesting points. British and American youth who belong to subcultures usually come from poor working-class families. In Canada, however, those who take part in youth subcultures cut across all economic classes but mostly belong to the middle class. Also, British and American youth subcultures tend to be based on common values, attitudes and beliefs. This doesn't seem to be the case in Canada.

"I'm part of a gang. It's nothing like they say. We sometimes roll people for their docs or for their jackets – but only once a month – then someone rolls you – it's all a game."

- There was no agreement on how to define a gang. Some people felt that gangs committed and encouraged violent acts. Others saw gangs as "groups of kids just hanging out" or described them as a substitute family for youth because they provide members with a sense of security and belonging

- People also had differing views about how serious or widespread the gang phenomenon is:
  - parents are worried about losing a generation to gangs and drugs
  - service workers are not convinced by what they consider mass media exaggeration
  - youth views differ, according to their definition of and exposure to youth gangs

- Many youth believe that the mass media have played up the gang problem in Metro Toronto and that racism is a factor here. For example, a group of white youth hanging out is "just a bunch of kids" while a group of black youth "must be up to something"

- Some youth said that gang incidents are isolated and they feel safe at school. Other people, however, talked about teachers/police patrolling the halls

- Violent gang behaviour was explained as the need to defend or avenge the treatment of friends. Some suggested that the sense of purpose and belonging that go along with gang membership could be channeled into productive activities

- Some youth claimed that swarming often starts out as fun but often doesn't end until someone is hurt.

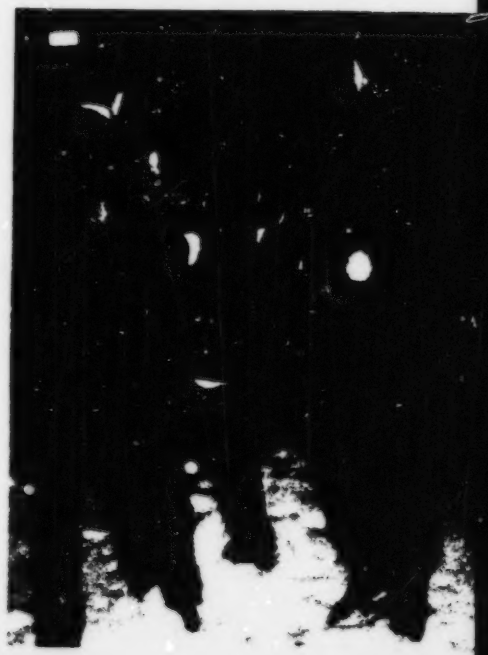
LAW ENFORCEMENT

DESPITE THE CONCERN ABOUT YOUTH GANG ACTIVITIES, BETWEEN 1985 AND 1989, the number of arrests for six major crime categories (robbery, sexual assault, assault, break and enter, theft and vehicle theft) remained stable for the 12 - 24 year old age group as a whole. However, arrests increased by 8.8% for the 12 - 15 year age group, while arrests decreased for both the 16 - 17 age group and for the 18 - 24 year olds.

The number of male Young Offenders charged with criminal code offenses between 1985 and 1989 has remained roughly the same. Female Offenders have increased by about 18% in the same period. The numbers of females charged is still much lower than those of male offenders (6,500 males were charged in 1989 versus 1,970 females).*

- Police-related issues were rarely raised in a positive light by youth
- A number of youth reported that they had been mistreated by police or knew of others who had been mistreated. However, most stated that individual officers were the problem, rather than the police force as a whole
- Many participants focused on police treatment of street youth and visible minority youth
- Youth respondents believe that police discriminate against visible minority youth – for example, blacks are more frequently questioned because "they are all seen as drug dealers." This was considered unfair
- Many black youth felt they were more likely to be treated fairly by a black police officer than a white officer because the black officer would understand their culture and background
- Some youth noted that social class as well as race affects the way police officers treat people – for example, the poor, regardless of their colour, don't get treated very well either
- A number of suggestions to address these issues were made by different groups:
  - anti-racist training for police
  - more ethnic representation on the police force
  - an independent police complaints system
  - police should enforce laws, not interpret them
  - police training should stress respect for all, including youth
- The Young Offender's Act was frequently mentioned. Some felt that the Act teaches youth to disregard the law and that it needs revision. Quite a few people didn't know or understand the Act.

"Police often stop you if they think you are a drug dealer, especially if you are black; this is unfair."



* Environment Assessment, 1990. Metro Toronto Police Force.

MASS MEDIA

THE MASS MEDIA AFFECT ALMOST EVERY ASPECT OF LIFE IN OUR SOCIETY. Images of "the good life" or the "right" kind of man or woman, ideas about how people relate to one another, information about what is happening here and around the world are packaged for us by those who work in and own the "consciousness industries".

Young people are, perhaps, especially susceptible to the values promoted by the mass media. And even their youth culture is, in many ways, a media product.

"Media often blame youth; even if kids are innocent, they don't believe them."

➡ A broad range of critical comments were made about media exaggeration, confusion and distortion of issues. Some of the most common were as follows:

- the media sensationalize gang and racial incidents
- the media reinforce racial stereotypes
- the media glorify sex and violence
- the media exaggerate youth problems and blame youth
- reporting is bad or unfair
- the media should cover some good news once in a while, not just negative items
- commercials should be censored to remove mixed messages to youth – for example, beer commercials directly contradict anti-drug ads
- the media are racist.

RACISM

"You grow up thinking you are the same as other people. Then you realize that you are different because people treat you different."

➡ Youth, parents and service workers generally believed that racism was widespread and many session participants had experienced it directly. Unsolicited comments about racism centred mainly on police-minority relations and racism in the schools. A more in-depth discussion of racism occurred among people in the small discussion groups. Some of their specific comments follow:

- people's ethnic background affects the way they are treated by the police. Black and Native youth are most often harassed
- teachers brand immigrants and members of visible minorities as trouble makers
- people in positions of power are not representative of the total population
- images in advertising and the mass media generally portray white society

➡ People agreed that racism should be eliminated

➡ Although it was agreed that it was a much smaller problem, there was some discussion about reverse racism; that is, that racism is not only directed towards visible minorities but also towards whites by these visible minorities

➡ To combat racism, some participants suggested that people need to learn more about one another's cultures.

YOUTH INVOLVEMENT

YOUTH SAY THEY WANT TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THEIR own lives but they have no power.

- Many questioned the lack of youth representation on the Metro Youth Task Force
- Youth want no more consultation without action
- Youth are not satisfied with tokenism
- There should be no implementation of Task Force recommendations or new programs and policies without significant youth involvement. This point was raised frequently, particularly vis-a-vis recreation programs.

GENERAL CONCERNS

- Youth identified a range of issues which affect the whole community. These include:
  - the environment
  - the cost of living
  - government spending on high-profile projects like the Skydome and the Olympics bid while people are hungry and homeless

These comments show that youth, like much of the population, feel a lack of control over their lives, a frustration with the powers that be, and little confidence that the right decisions are being made for the future.

"We are n't considered because we can't vote."

2.2. GETTING SERVICES IN METRO

WHAT'S IT LIKE TO BE YOUNG AND IN CRISIS? Are services available when help is needed? Are they difficult or easy to get? To give some sense of what often happens, we've created the following scenarios based on actual cases.

KEVIN

At the age of 10, Kevin became a ward of Children's Aid. During the next few years, he lived with three different foster families and in two group homes. A learning disability made reading, writing and math very difficult for him and he dropped out of school in grade nine. He's had a few jobs here and there but either he's left them or they've left him.

Since he's no longer part of the education system, Kevin can't get career counselling from the school. He's gone to the Canada Employment Centre but the job boards there are not geared to youth, especially those with literacy and numeracy problems. And he isn't eligible for the Futures program because his literacy skills aren't good enough.

Kevin did show up at an agency that tries to help kids develop the kinds of skills they need to get and hold a job. He feels comfortable there and his worker is eager to start meeting with him on a regular basis. However, Kevin needs a lot more than job search know-how. He needs psychological counselling and training to develop his social and life skills. And he could also use some help with his heavy reliance on alcohol. Since this agency can deal with job-related issues only, his worker spends a lot of time on the phone, trying to find service agencies that can accommodate Kevin's other needs. Kevin likes her and he likes the agency but he's not sure he's going to keep coming back. What he definitely doesn't like is having to go to three or four different places, each of which will deal with a different "bit" of him.

LUCILLE

Seventeen-year-old Lucille had been acting strangely in school for weeks. She was constantly tense, would sometimes rush out of the room during a class, and seemed frequently on the verge of tears. When her teacher talked with her after school one day, Lucille spilled out her story about being sexually abused at home. The teacher notified the guidance counsellor who called up Children's Aid. However, since Lucille was over 16, she was not eligible for their services.

Through the school board, her teacher tried to contact a youth counselling agency. Lucille and her family, however, had already had some counselling through another agency. Lucille desperately wanted a female therapist, whom she could see on her own. Since Lucille had no financial resources, any counsellor she saw would have to be covered by OHIP.

Her teacher, meanwhile, decided that she would, as a personal project, take on the task of finding someone to see Lucille. She spent hours on the phone with no success. Psychiatrists had closed off their waiting lists or were no longer seeing people or were so far away that Lucille, in her emotionally distraught state, could not manage to keep an appointment that required her to travel an hour to the counsellor's office. Her teacher felt that what Lucille needed was someone she could talk to right on the school premises.

Her teacher finally gave up. Lucille dropped out of school.

PETER

Peter arrived in Toronto three years ago. He was 12 years old at the time but even back in Hong Kong, school hadn't been his favourite place. His father stayed behind in Hong Kong to take care of their small business, but he did come visit as often as he could. Peter's mother worked part-time in a drugstore but knew almost no one here.

For Peter, life in Toronto was difficult. He had few friends and his English was poor. When the school notified Peter's mother that he had been cutting classes, challenging authority and getting in scraps with other students, she didn't know what to do. The punishments she meted out only seemed to make things worse.

Even though Peter's father was living with them by then, neither parent felt able to control the situation. The school social worker and Children's Aid became involved. It was then that Peter's parents discovered that it was against the law for them to punish Peter physically. At the same time, they felt quite baffled by the education system and couldn't read Peter's records and reports very well.

Since none of the people with whom they dealt with spoke Chinese, Peter's parents had to use an interpreter. But information got lost and Peter's mother in particular felt as though she couldn't really express herself. She wanted to talk with someone who not only spoke her language but understood what the relations between parents and children were supposed to be in her own culture. The final result was frustration and lack of comprehension all the way around.

RYAN

Ryan was 16 and confused: he wondered if he might be gay but didn't dare talk about his confusion and anxieties with anyone he knows. Relations with his family started to deteriorate and his school work suffered. Ryan's teacher referred him to the school social worker but the issue of sexual orientation never came up and Ryan wasn't about to raise the subject. Ryan was then referred to a community agency which tried to work with him and his family. Little progress was made and the counsellor dealing with Ryan started to feel discouraged. One day, during a counselling session, Ryan made a passing remark about homosexuality. His worker noticed the reference but was reluctant to make a comment on Ryan's records in case it might somehow be used against him later. Besides, the counsellor himself was not sure about where to turn. His training had in no way prepared him to deal with issues around human sexuality. A chance remark to a colleague gave him information about a gay youth support group. Eventually, Ryan made contact with the group and found the support he needed.

Ryan is one of the lucky ones. It is estimated that one out of every ten youth in Canada is either lesbian or gay; for most of them, there are no services at all.

GETTING SERVICES
(CONT'D)

"We want action. There are enough committees and studies."

THE SCENARIOS DESCRIBED ABOVE HAVE FOCUSED ON YOUNG PEOPLE WITH "SPECIAL NEEDS", but to varying degrees, the obstacles they meet are experienced by nearly everyone who has to look for help outside of the usual network of family and friends. This is so, even though Metro Toronto has one of the best systems of social services in Canada.

Certainly, there are a number of problem areas. In general, growth in the services field has slowed down over the past few years, but services dealing with youth have been affected most of all. It seems as though some policy-makers think that because there are fewer youth, there are fewer needs. Cuts to programs have been made accordingly, especially to employment services.

The lack of co-ordination among existing services means that people trying to get information or a referral for a service they require desperately, may feel as though they are lost in a perpetual maze. Services are fragmented for many reasons, including funding requirements and differing areas of responsibility.

Problems, however, tend not to divide themselves up neatly according to rules and regulations. So, for instance, those youth who straddle the no-man's land between 16-18 years of age, may find that there are precious few resources available for the person unfortunate enough to have a crisis at the age of 17.

Geography plays its part too, since certain areas are well serviced while others, usually the suburbs, are often service-poor.

As well, there are some issues which are very difficult to deal with. Only recently has there been recognition of the unique service needs of victims of incest and sexual assault and more dealing with issues of sexual orientation. As a result there is still a serious lack of specialized services to meet these needs.

This quick survey of the social services landscape in Metro leads to a few observations: there is no commonly accepted definition of youth; there is no one body or Ministry ultimately responsible for youth; and there is no agreement on how problems arise, are defined and are resolved.

SECTION 3: RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

TODAY'S YOUNG PEOPLE ARE TOMORROW'S LEADERS. As such, they should be recognized and treated as full citizens. Being a citizen means having certain basic rights and responsibilities. We feel we need to affirm these rights for youth – rights to a voice, a role and access to opportunities and services. In turn, young people must accept that rights also imply responsibilities and that they, too, are responsible for their actions.

The Metro Youth Task Force therefore proposes the following list of basic rights and responsibilities. We do so to emphasize our commitment to recognize youth as full-fledged citizens of Metro. These rights and responsibilities also underpin our overall approach to working with youth.

RIGHTS:

As a society, we place tremendous expectations on our youth, for they will be our future leaders, workers, thinkers and decision makers. We therefore have an obligation, as a community, to provide or ensure an environment that permits young people to develop to their full potential. We believe that the following rights are essential to achieve this critically important goal:

1 – Young people have the right to adequate food and shelter, and other basic physical necessities.

2 – Young people have the right to a safe, clean environment.

3 – Young people have the right to live in physical safety, free from intimidation and threats of violence.

4 – Young people have the right to be cared for and supported emotionally in a way that fosters self-respect and a positive self-image.

5 – Young people have the right to enjoy basic civil rights in a society where racism and other forms of discrimination are prohibited.

6 – Young people have the right to be guaranteed equal access to opportunities available to the general population, as well as access to whatever services they need.

7 – Young people have the right to live in a community where the diversity of nationality, race, language, culture, ethnicity and religion is valued.

8 – Young people have the right to participate as fully as possible in community life and specifically, in the decisions that affect their lives.

9 – Young people have the right to an appropriate education that will help them develop their skills and abilities, while encouraging self-respect. Their education should prepare them for further educational or employment opportunities and full participation in our society.

10 – Young people have the right to an easily accessible, comprehensive system of human services.

11 – Young people have the right to become aware of and participate in a broad range of cultural and recreational activities.

RESPONSIBILITIES:

We believe youth have the following responsibilities to themselves and other residents of Metro Toronto:

1 – Young people must act according to the laws that govern all Metro residents.

2 – Young people must be responsible for the impact of their actions on other people, their families and their communities. They must try to develop self-sufficient lives within these communities.

3 – Young people must try to give something back to their communities by contributing their skills and abilities wherever possible.

SECTION 4: KEY ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

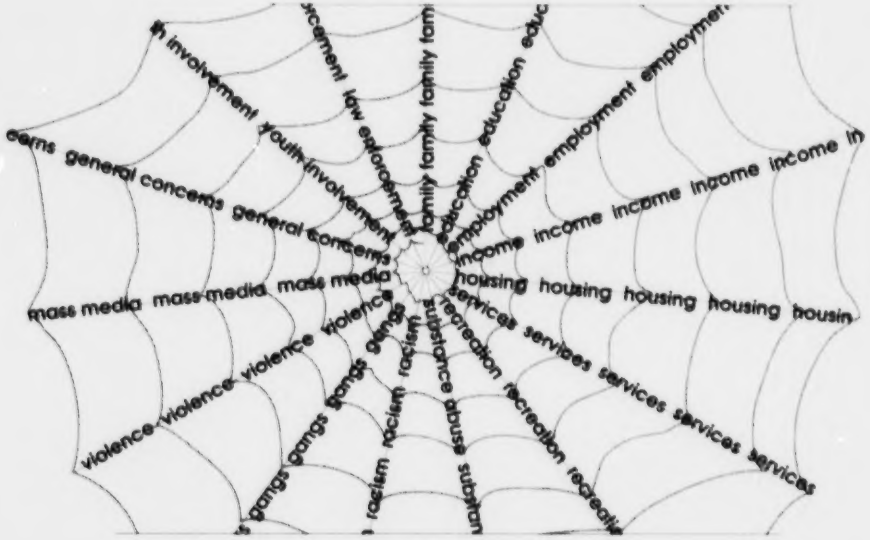
4.1. KEY ISSUES

THE YOUTH TASK FORCE WAS ORIGINALLY FORMED BECAUSE OF WIDESPREAD CONCERN about drug use and gang episodes involving young people. But, after doing background research and extensive community consultations, Task Force members realized that such problems, though critical, were simply the tip of the iceberg. As all the accumulated information was analyzed, certain key issues, pointing to a deeper set of problems, began to emerge.

Although these issues are dealt with in this section one by one, they are, in fact, connected in a complex and organic way. To best represent their multiple linkages, we have chosen the image of a web. For instance, since most young people still live with their families, factors which influence youth affect their families too, and stresses which affect the family also have consequences for youth.

Though many issues raised in the consultations – housing, poverty, growing violence – apply to us all, regardless of age, we have concentrated here on the specific impact such issues have on young people. We focus, too, on institutions which pertain especially to youth, like the school system.

In the General Introduction to this report, we sketched in some details of the current social landscape in Metro Toronto.



To provide a context for the key issues that follow, we will mention just a few of them again.

Today's young people have inherited severe economic and environmental problems. They must face them in a city which has been transformed over the past 20 years. New family structures, neighbourhoods which have changed in size and composition, and the decline of mainstream religious institutions are just part of this transformation. These events have contributed to both a sense of exhilaration about the future and a feeling of unease about the pace and nature of these changes.

More immediately, people – including youth – are less likely to know their neighbours. Many comment that they are missing a sense of community and the informal support systems that a vibrant neighbourhood can offer.

It is against this background that the following key issues must be seen.

KEY ISSUES (CONT'D)

NARROW DEFINITION OF YOUTH

The United Nations has defined youth as the time of life between the ages of 15-24. However, age-based definitions do not fit every case. Some youth are forced out on their own while very young; for others, the relative freedom and experimentation associated with adolescence continues on into their mid-twenties. Despite these variations, most services for young people tend to focus on narrowly defined age groups. Children's Aid Societies, for instance, are responsible for youth in care until the age of 18, regardless of where these youth may be in their process of development. The fact that today's 12 and 13-year-olds are often as sophisticated as the 16-year-olds of previous generations makes the problem of age-limited services even more acute.

In contrast to this narrow definition, the Task Force prefers to see youth as a continuum, a period of transition between dependence on parents or guardians and eventual adult responsibility.

FRAGMENTED JURISDICTIONS

Who is responsible for youth, anyhow? The answer is far from clear. Efforts to meet the needs of youth and their families are fragmented. In Metro, youth policies and services are developed and delivered by four levels of government, various large institutions like the Children's Aid Societies and the school boards, and many community agencies. There are few efforts at co-ordination. As a result, fragmentation, gaps, and overlapping or unclear areas of responsibility are the rule. Consequently, available resources may not be used as effectively as possible. In Metro, for instance, School Boards have facilities in every community. Community agencies and recreation departments, however, are not always able to use these facilities.

SERVICES

Metro Toronto has a well-developed and fairly broad-based system for delivering human services. Nevertheless, significant problems have been identified which strongly affect everyone who needs those services, including youth.

- due to funding criteria, programs are often set up to deal with crisis situations rather than address the roots of problems
- the system is complicated and fragmented; this may be the case because so many different jurisdictions are involved
- clear information about services may be difficult to find
- not everyone has equal access to services; the barriers may be geographic (that is, one must live in a certain area) or tied to people's ethnic/racial/linguistic backgrounds
- community-based mental health services, services for transitional-age youth (16-18 years) and services for immigrants and refugee youth are notably absent
- users often have to fit themselves to the services rather than the services adapting to the users' needs.

"Programmes like FUTURES take too long – I registered 6 weeks ago, no-one has called me."

KEY ISSUES (CONT'D)

There are also a number of difficulties specific to youth:

- funding is a serious problem for youth-related services. Due to major cutbacks at all levels of government, current programs cannot adequately meet youth needs. As well, the inflexibility of many funding arrangements makes delivering services very difficult

- since young people are rarely involved in planning, developing and delivering services, they may feel that the services available to them are not "youth appropriate".

POLICE SERVICES

People raised a number of concerns about police officers and their role in the community:

- police tend to work in isolation from other service providers for youth. This fact exaggerates an already fragmented response to youth problems

- police officers work with young people in both law enforcement and educational capacities. However, due to the current structure of the Police Force, these activities are not combined. This means that different police officers come to schools, agencies and recreation centres for different reasons. Such a separation makes it difficult for effective relationships to develop between the police and the community, especially youth

- youth expressed a serious lack of trust in adult institutions, particularly the police. In general, they felt that the police treat young people unfairly. Racial minority youth, Native youth and "street youth" noted special problems in this regard

- within schools, student interaction with the police mainly occurs around "incidents" and is usually negative. This, too, makes it hard to develop good relationships between police officers and youth in a setting where there are opportunities for building trust.

KEY ISSUES (CONT'D)

EDUCATION

Overall, standards of education continue to rise and drop-out rates to decline. Nevertheless, significant numbers of youth do not succeed within the system ... 25% of those who enter high schools in Metro will leave before completing their studies.

The drop-out rate, the changing ethno-racial composition of the school-age population and the increasingly high skill levels needed in our technological society have forced the educational system to provide a whole new range of services. These include: lifeskills, childcare services, race relations training and so forth. Limitations of mandate, funding and time have made it difficult for school systems to address this broad range of needs, although academic success is often inhibited by lack of adequate support services for youth and their families.

In spite of the rapid changes schools have to deal with, there is no general agreement about their future role. While some school boards believe the school system should not be involved in providing social services, others vigorously maintain that they must take more responsibility for the welfare of their students.

Finally, there are increasing expectations that schools serve as focal points for the whole community by being freely available to the general public. This creates another series of pressures on schools which may not have the resources to address them.

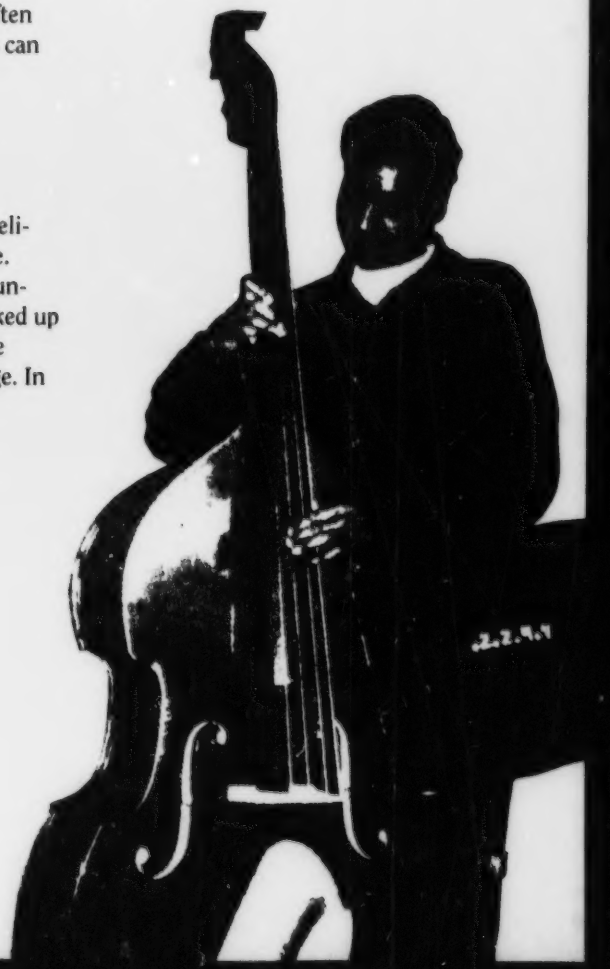
RECREATION

Recreational services are important but underfunded. Also, recreation programs have traditionally focused on North American sports and other competitive activities which tend to exclude young women and youth from diverse cultures. Rarely are young people involved in planning and developing the programs intended for them.

Though sports programs can provide valuable opportunities to develop organizational skills, leadership qualities and the ability to qualify for scholarships, they are often seen as an end in themselves and such opportunities can be squandered.

RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS

Once major participants in the social services field, religious institutions have become less central over time. Some churches still play a significant role, such as running food banks. However, as a rule, they are not linked up with other service systems. As a result, their available facilities are not often used by the community at large. In a time of scarce resources, this is regrettable.



KEY ISSUES
(CONT'D)

HOUSING

The high cost of housing in Metro affects many people, but has a particular impact on youth. It is now almost impossible for most young people to find an affordable place to live. High rents keep them from setting up independent homes. Young people have little access to subsidized or co-op housing which have age requirements that often exclude youth. There are few youth shelters, particularly in the suburbs, and not enough group homes or other kinds of supervised transitional housing. For some young people, the street seems to be the only housing option they can find.

DISCRIMINATION AGAINST YOUTH

Youth, as a whole, may face discrimination based on age. For instance, the minimum hourly wage for youth under 18 is 85 cents less than that for adults; young people are often at a disadvantage when competing for housing or employment; youth under 18 require parental consent for a range of services.

YOUTH INVOLVEMENT

Although young people have shown interest in taking responsibility for their lives, they have rarely been given the opportunity. Parents, schools, community agencies and government all make decisions about and for youth but almost never include them in the decision making process.

MASS MEDIA

Without a doubt, the mass media are a powerful influence on youth. Both directly and indirectly, they shape attitudes and legitimize values. They tend to sensationalize violence and promote unattainable lifestyles. Media depictions of youth are often negative and unrealistic.

Many ads offer "quick fix" solutions to a host of social ills and glamorize alcohol consumption, even though messages about a drug-free society are widespread. They also present as "normal" and given, a homogeneous, white society that bears no relation to the lives of many youth.

ALIENATION

Many young people have intense feelings of frustration and alienation. The root causes are numerous: the immense emotional and physical changes of adolescence; diminished expectations in the face of reduced opportunities; the erosion of traditional support systems like the family, the neighbourhood and religious institutions; and general feelings of "not being understood" by adults. For young people who find themselves adrift in an apparently uncaring society – those who are homeless, poor, unemployable – alienation is a direct result of being powerless and of living on the margins. Moreover, along with the rest of society, youth share an increasing disenchantment with political and social institutions. There is a general feeling that events are beyond the average person's control. This is especially true for youth, who are rarely allowed to help shape the decisions that affect their lives.

At the same time, many adults feel alienated from young people and are unable to provide direction and necessary support. Seniors, particularly, fear youth and find little common ground on which to build effective relationships.

KEY ISSUES
(CONT'D)

RACISM

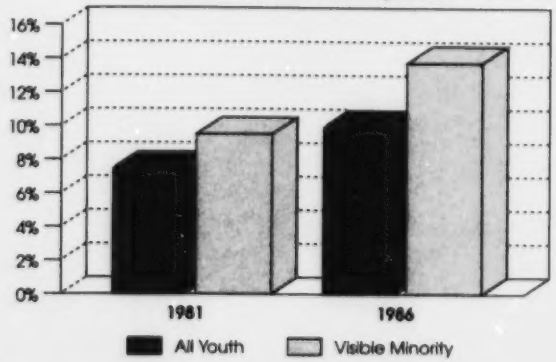
In addition to the host of challenges faced by mainstream youth, young people from racial and ethnic minority communities must cope with racism, both subtle and obvious.

In an increasingly diverse city that embraces "multiculturalism", denying people opportunities on the basis of race, language or culture has far-reaching implications. The commitment and skills of significant numbers of youth may be wasted. Also, this kind of exclusion risks marginalizing ever larger segments of the population.

As well, it fosters frustration and anger which lead to feelings of alienation among ethnic and racial minority youth.

Compared with some American and British cities, incidents of racial violence in Metro are still comparatively few. However, examples from elsewhere suggest that racism, combined with economic marginalization, creates a climate conducive to inter-racial violence.

Metro Unemployment Rates: 1981 and 1986
All Youth vs Visible Minority Youth



Source: Employment Equity Availability Data, 1989. Employment and Immigration Canada.

POVERTY

Thousands of young people in Metro are living in poverty. Without a doubt, the current recession will increase the amount of poverty in general, and have a profound effect on youth in particular.

Poverty means more than just not having money. Recent studies have shown that children who are poor are at risk – they are more prone to poor physical and mental health; they are much more likely to have low levels of educational achievement and problems with literacy.

Meanwhile, young people today are growing up in a society with a conspicuous emphasis on material possessions. But the gap between rich and poor is widening, and the cost of living in Metro is rising rapidly.

Young people, who lack the skills and education to secure good jobs, increasingly find themselves trapped in entry-level, low-paying, dead-end positions. This situation produces feelings of despair and exclusion, as more youth feel they will never be able to achieve a comfortable lifestyle or live as well as their parents.

Above all, poverty is a barrier to equal opportunity. Therefore, the true impact of poverty on young people cannot be measured in the present: we must take into account the social cost of unequal futures.

KEY ISSUES (CONT'D)

"I tell the welfare officers I can't go home, but when they check, my mother says I can. So welfare sends me home and I get the shit kicked out of me again."

VIOLENCE

There are several indications that our society is becoming more violent:

- weapons are more widely available and more frequently used
- reports of violence against women in the form of both wife abuse and sexual assault are increasing dramatically
- in more than half of the cases where women are abused, their children are watching. Some of these children may become victims themselves.

While young people have traditionally challenged authority and "acted out" in different ways, the phenomenon of "youth gangs" in Metro has caused some alarm. Participants at some consultations described incidents of intimidation in schools. Most of these incidents were not connected with drug or alcohol abuse nor were they necessarily associated with theft. This surge in what appears to be "violence for violence's sake" was one of the key factors leading to the creation of the Task Force.

However, while youth sometimes commit acts of violence, more often they are, or have been, victims of such acts. Many young people have run away from abusive family situations. An alarming number of these youth are forced onto the streets where they experience still more violence and/or sexual assault.

With the mass media's tendency to sensationalize all types of violence, it is perhaps easy to remain unaware of how pervasive violence in the home really is. Therefore, it is very important to focus not only on gang and public violence but to also develop responses to the kind of violence that goes on behind the headlines and behind closed doors.

CONCLUSIONS

Many of the issues identified in this section are not new. However, their scale and impact on youth is such that current responses are no longer adequate or appropriate. In some cases, new programs and services are required; in others, new approaches must be tried. Whatever the circumstances, addressing the needs of youth must become a priority.

4.2. KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

THE FOLLOWING ACTION PLAN is a response to the key issues identified in the research and community consultations undertaken by the Youth Task Force. The Plan was developed with the Basic Rights and Responsibilities for Youth in mind. Given the relative powerlessness of youth in our society, we have tried our utmost to formulate a plan in which youth are centrally involved in dealing with the issues that affect them. As well, the recommendations set forth in the Action Plan are based upon the hundreds of comments and suggestions made by participants in the various consultation sessions. A detailed summary of these Recommendations from the Consultations is available in the appendix to this report.

A METRO YOUTH COUNCIL:

1 – We recommend that Metro Council promote youth involvement in its decision-making process and in program development by establishing a Metro Youth Council (M.Y.C.) comprised of youth with the following mandate:

- to assist Metro Council in assessing and developing programs and services for youth
- to review and advise on implementing the recommendations of the Metro Youth Task Force
- to assess the impact on youth of the actions of other levels of government and the community
- to help Metro advocate for appropriate and adequate youth services
- to promote youth leadership in community problem solving and service provision.

2 – We recommend that Metro ensure that appropriate linkages are established between the Metro Youth Council and Metro Council and its various departments and agencies, to make certain that youth are consulted first in matters that concern them.

3 – We recommend that Metro provide the Metro Youth Council with adequate resources and staff support to function effectively.

4 – We recommend that Metro establish a mandate and operating policies for the M.Y.C. Metro should also set up an appropriate mechanism for appointing members to the M.Y.C. to ensure that it is accessible to Metro's diverse youth population.

5 – We recommend that Metro, with the assistance of the Metro Youth Council, play a leadership role in promoting youth issues by:

- establishing a policy requiring Metro funded agencies, commissions and boards to have some youth representation in their decision making
- urging organizations in the community and other levels of government to establish mechanisms to ensure that youth are adequately consulted
- advocating to the Province and the Federal government that youth programs be assigned a higher priority.

"We want everyone to cooperate and get change."

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS (CONT'D)

* The basic premise of anti-racist education is the belief that a good education is one which is equally accessible to all children and youth regardless of their ethnic, racial or cultural background. Furthermore, this education must equip all our children to fully participate in a society that is increasingly multi-racial and multicultural.

  Anti-racist education presumes that changes aimed at making the school system accessible must involve all educational services, as well as the people who deliver them. Efforts to change curriculum alone are necessary but incomplete. Successful anti-racist education is equally dependent upon changes to programs, processes, practices and people.

  Source:

  Fran Reid and Alok Mukherjee. Anti-Racist Education, 1991. Canadian School Boards Association, Unpublished Manuscript.

SCHOOLS:

1 – In light of the increasing diversity of Metro's youth population and the subsequent diversity of needs, we recommend that Metro encourage the Provincial Government to recognize the special needs of Metro's youth through its funding allocations to school boards.

2 – Given the pressures on schools to become more actively involved in helping students access the range of social services they need, we recommend that Metro Council work together with local school boards to share information on existing efforts, and to identify and support new strategies to accomplish this goal more effectively.

3 – In light of the range of excellent programs already in existence involving community use of schools, we recommend that Metro encourage and co-operate with local school boards to share this information and help develop Metro-wide guidelines which would give all groups equal access to using school buildings in their neighbourhood.

4 – We recommend that Metro Council encourage, support and cooperate with Area Municipalities in developing and funding more youth programs in schools, and seek cooperative approaches to remove barriers which prohibit such programming.

5 – We recommend that Metro Council co-operate with school boards to seek special funding from senior levels of government for more English as a Second Language (E.S.L.) instruction in the schools for youth and their families.

6 – In view of the importance of schools in the lives of youth, and the role of educators in promoting positive social values, we further recommend that:

- Metro Council work with the Provincial Government and school boards to continue developing and implementing anti-racist* programs in the schools
- Metro Council encourage and support local school boards to host mandatory anti-racist training sessions for all teachers in Metro schools, as part of their professional development programs
- Metro Council encourage and support local school boards to develop, share and publicize policies on racism, to provide anti-racist education to students, and to develop a curriculum that reflects the cultural diversity of their students.

7 – In light of the difficulties that some parents have in communicating with the schools about issues and problems affecting their children, we commend existing initiatives and recommend that school boards be encouraged to continue their efforts with respect to community outreach initiatives and translation services.

8 – Despite dramatic improvements over the years, drop-out rates remain significant. We recommend that local governments, school boards, and community agencies meet together to co-ordinate programs and strategies to address the problem.

9 – We further recommend the development of enhanced and expanded co-operative education programs as a means of providing alternatives to students at risk of dropping out.

10 – Recognizing that bullying and all forms of intimidation are serious problems in the schools we recommend that:

- school boards review their present policies with respect to violence and weapons in the schools to ensure that their regulations adequately address the problem

- in an effort to prevent the development of "bullying" behaviour, school boards seek to determine early identification criteria in young children, which would allow them to modify such behaviour at an early stage in the child's development.

11 – We recommend that school boards, working with the Ministry of Education, explore means of getting OAC credits for Native Studies, Black Studies and other courses that communities deem appropriate.

COMBATTING RACISM:

1 – Given that racial minority youth face racism and racial discrimination and that this fosters alienation, acts as a barrier to opportunity and denies the exercise of basic rights, we recommend that Metro ensure that all its Departments and Commissions, including the Police, TTC and Metro-funded agencies, develop and implement educational programs on managing racial diversity which specifically recognize and address the impact of racism on youth.

2 – We further recommend that Metro review options for requiring its own contracted agencies and suppliers to implement employment equity programs.

3 – Anti-racism must be a component of all our lives. Therefore, we also recommend that Metro advocate for and assist in developing and funding similar anti-racist training for educational institutions and the community-at-large.

4 – We recommend that Metro host a forum on anti-racism for personnel from schools, social services, religious institutions and the police, to share information and examine the impact of racism on the delivery of services to a diverse population.

5 – We further recommend that Metro implement workshops to assist agencies in developing and implementing anti-racist policies.

6 – Recognizing that racial discrimination has concrete negative effects and that anti-racist education must be complemented by direct actions to reduce discrimination, we recommend that Metro advocate in favour of mandatory employment equity to eliminate racial discrimination and systemic barriers to employment of youth.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS (CONT'D)

"No-one sticks up for black youth."

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS (CONT'D)

DISCRIMINATION AGAINST YOUTH:

1 – In light of broadly expressed concerns regarding unequal treatment on the basis of age, we recommend that Metro identify and alter policies or programs which impact on youth unfairly and that Metro move immediately to:

- narrow the gap between the adult minimum wage and that paid to youth employed by or through the Corporation
- recommend that the Government of Ontario narrow the gap between and eventually eliminate the different minimum wages based on age
- review the current requirements for parental consent for youth 16 to 18 who are seeking welfare to ensure that youth, who are not living at home or who may be at risk in the home, do not have their welfare eligibility tied to their parents
- review the Metro Corporation's operations to identify other age-based discrimination and suggest strategies for its elimination.

POLICE:

1 – We recommend that the Metro Police, working in consultation with the community, review and revise, as appropriate, the current organization of their youth-related services. Specifically, efforts to better integrate enforcement officers with those officers involved in educational and other special programs in the schools are recommended.

2 – We recommend that the Metro Police identify and implement mechanisms to increase the level of experience of officers in Youth Bureaus. These mechanisms might include enhanced training including an orientation period in a youth-serving agency in the area, and providing incentives to keep personnel in Youth Bureaus for longer periods.

3 – In view of the lack of trust in police expressed by many youth, and particularly Native, racial minority and "street" youth, we recommend that the Metro Police identify and implement new strategies to foster and enhance positive interaction between youth and the police. These might include:

- specific police officers consistently associated with schools and perhaps even providing supervision for after-hours events in the school
- establishing close working relationships with social agencies
- on-going dialogues between Youth Bureau staff and youth groups
- a Metro Youth Council for the Force.

4 – We recommend that the Police Force make its position on racism clear by:

- clearly communicating to youth the public complaint process for reporting alleged racist behaviour on the part of the police officers
- explaining the repercussions for officers found to have acted in a racist manner.

5 – We recommend that the police include, as appropriate, youth-specific components within all their training programs. We further recommend that intensive and on-going anti-racist training, including a specific youth component, be mandatory.

6 – We recommend that the Province, in developing curriculum for Police cadets enrolled at the Ontario Police College:

- develop anti-racist programs for new recruits which are youth specific
- ensure that all appropriate training is conducted in a manner which emphasizes racial and cultural sensitivity
- ensure that community groups representing our diverse ethno-racial population are consulted in the process of revising the existing curriculum.

7 – We recommend that police officers be mandated to place an even greater emphasis on activities designed to prevent and reduce crime. These might include:

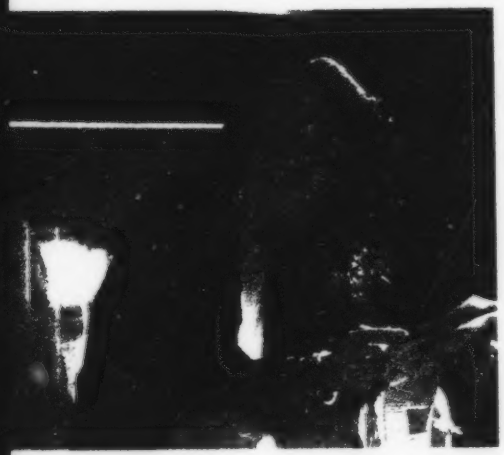
- more "de-briefing" with youth in the aftermath of "gang" incidents, specifically discussing the impact of violence on victims
- assisting school boards, through education and other supports, to promote weapons-free schools.

8 – We recommend that the police, working in co-operation with school boards, place a very high priority on ensuring that the schools are safe and that students do not experience intimidation and physical assaults that interfere with their education.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS (CONT'D)

"Police have no right to be violent, or so rude."

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS (CONT'D)



POVERTY:

1 – Responses to poverty can take two forms: giving people money to supplement their incomes or developing strategies to overcome the structural causes of poverty by attacking it at its roots.

To achieve these objectives, we recommend that:

- Metro Council advocate with the Province to enact outstanding reforms proposed by the Social Assistance Review Committee and ensure that these reforms are implemented at the Metro level
- Metro Council support the Child Poverty Action Group's efforts to develop comprehensive strategies to address and eliminate child and youth poverty.

2 – In light of recent studies which emphasize the power of both adult role models and good friendships to minimize the negative impacts of poverty, we recommend that support for social/recreational programs be seen as a critical component in addressing poverty at its roots.

3 – As youth from poor families, particularly those who face the added barriers of racial discrimination, often lack access to job networks, we recommend that:

- Metro work with school boards, agencies, other levels of government, and the private sector, to create more employment opportunities for disadvantaged youth
- Metro target youth from low-income families, and specifically Native and visible minority youth, in its summer employment programs.
- Metro work with school boards to provide more employment opportunities for co-op education programs
- Metro, in co-operation with local post secondary institutions, support the development of initiatives to allow low income youth to access universities and colleges
- Metro continue to support the Metro Youth Job Corps and Outreach Programs for hard to serve youth.
- The Metro Toronto Housing Authority be encouraged to review policies and practices regarding rent calculation to ensure that disincentives for youth to work are eliminated.

4 – We recommend that Metro review its policies in regard to students to ensure that adequate incentives and supports are available for low-income people trying to complete their high school education. Strategies for encouraging school attendance might include:

- Metropass available for all students at reduced rates
- student fares for people over 18 attending school
- Metropass for all welfare recipients attending school or training programs

PROGRAMS AND SERVICES:

1 – Given the high priority we have placed on youth services, we recommend that Metro Council stabilize existing services targetted to youth.

2 – Given the diversity of Metro's population, we further recommend that Metro Council support directly, through policies and funding mechanisms, the development of additional culturally and linguistically appropriate services for youth.

3 – In order to simplify access to programs and services for youth and reduce barriers between various kinds of services, we recommend that Metro Council convene a Metro-wide working group with a clear mandate and specific time frames. This group will bring together youth, service planners, funders and program deliverers from all levels of government and the community to address the following issues:

- the need to establish one centralized access point for information and referrals in the area of youth services
- access to the health care system by youth
- access for disabled youth
- access for Native youth and youth from diverse ethno-racial and linguistic backgrounds
- services for transitional-aged youth, that is, all those between the ages of 16 and 18.
- the impact of age restrictions on youth access to services such as welfare
- gaps in services, e.g. lack of programs for youth with mental health concerns.

4 – We further recommend that Metro Council, in its funding criteria, recognize the critical role of co-ordination and local planning in developing an effective and accessible services network.

5 – We recommend that Metro Council encourage and support Area Municipal Recreation Departments to create programs that:

- involve youth from the beginning in developing and implementing programs
- are culturally appropriate
- respond to diverse youth interests by developing more co-operative, non-competitive, and non-sport activities
- involve youth of diverse backgrounds
- provide youth with opportunities to demonstrate responsibility and leadership
- are equally sensitive to the needs and interests of young women and men
- are administered by staff appropriately trained to accomplish these objectives.

6 – We further recommend that Metro Council advocate with senior levels of government to recognize Metro's unique needs for adequate, accessible settlement and adaptation services, and to support the development of such services. It is important to note that youth make up 25% of Metro's refugee claimants.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS (CONT'D)

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS (CONT'D)

7 – We recommend that better linkages between social services, child welfare organizations and schools be made so that youth in crisis or under the care of children's aid societies receive the support they need to continue their schooling.

8 – We recommend that Metro encourage and support relevant organizations in the community to provide training and assistance to parents of transitional age youth to equip them to be more effective in understanding and managing the transition.

9 – In view of the establishment of the National Training Board by the Minister of Employment and Immigration, we recommend that Metro Council ensure that the training and employment needs of youth are identified and dealt with as new training strategies are developed.

SHELTER:

1 – Given the difficulties youth experience in finding affordable housing, and the large number of youth unable to live with their families, we recommend that:

- Metro reserve a portion of its housing units for youth and urge other subsidized housing providers to do the same
- Metro advocate for and support the development of more adequately funded shelters and transitional housing in all areas of the municipality
- Metro support further research directed at identifying specific difficulties youth face in finding and keeping appropriate shelter
- Generally, Metro continue to advocate for, and participate in, the development of affordable housing options for youth.

"If money was spent on housing and not circuses, people might not have to live on the street."

DEVELOPING COMMUNITIES:

1 – Given that strong healthy communities provide a stable, secure and supportive environment for youth, we recommend that Metro help communities to mobilize their resources and focus on resolving community problems by:

- committing additional resources to its current community development program and the Community and Neighbourhood Support Services Program
- seeking support and resources from senior levels of government to augment Metro's programs, as well as to support the funding of locally based community development programs in community centres, neighbourhoods houses, recreation centres, etc.
- co-ordinating existing community development efforts undertaken in various communities in Metro
- taking advantage of both the human and physical resources available within the school system, to help youth and facilitate interaction between the community and the school
- encouraging religious institutions to build stronger communities by sharing their human and physical resources with their local communities.

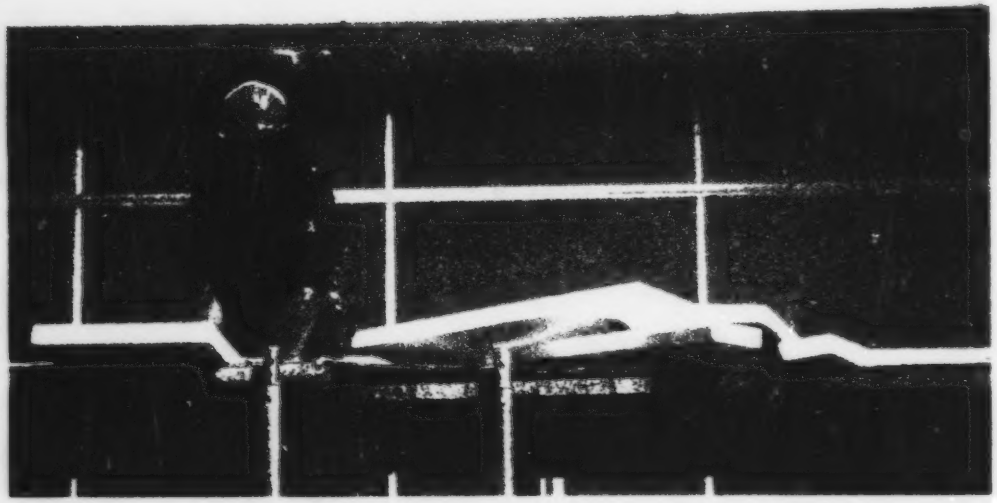
MASS MEDIA:

1 – The Metro Youth Task Force tried to "get behind the headlines" and develop a better understanding of the issues confronting youth in our community. In the interests of "staying behind those headlines", we recommend that Metro Council undertake various initiatives to ensure that youth issues are understood by the mass media and that they report on such issues responsibly. These initiatives would include the following:

- helping to establish a youth "Media Watch" to monitor media coverage of youth issues and, when needed, to facilitate an on-going dialogue between youth representatives and the media
- highlighting the positive contributions made by youth by providing awards and prizes in the areas of community service, citizenship and race relations
- organizing a forum or series of workshops with the media to highlight specific youth issues and seek mechanisms for on-going dialogue.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS (CONT'D)

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS (CONT'D)



WORKING WITH THE PRIVATE SECTOR

1 – We recommend that Metro involve the private sector as an active partner in addressing many of the issues raised in this report, including the following:

- providing employment opportunities for disadvantaged youth
- eliminating barriers to the full participation of Native youth and youth from diverse ethno-racial and linguistic backgrounds in the workforce
- working with schools to develop appropriate co-operative education programs
- supporting a broad range of social/recreational programming for youth.

2 – We recommend that the business community review employment standards and working conditions for youth.

3 – We recommend that the business community recognize students, and youth in general, demonstrating scholarship and entrepreneurship, as well as leadership in environmental and community concerns.

SECTION 5: WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

IN UNDERTAKING ITS WORK, THE METRO YOUTH TASK FORCE MADE A COMMITMENT to look at the root causes of problems facing youth in Metropolitan Toronto and not simply the incidents that make headlines. Extensive community consultation identified a broad range of inter-related issues affecting youth in our community. As well, many ideas and strategies for addressing these issues emerged from the consultations.

The Task Force, as anticipated, heard that a variety of services are lacking in many parts of Metropolitan Toronto. Community suggestions about specific gaps in service formed the basis for many of the Task Force's recommendations.

In addition, parents, educators, service workers and youth themselves all expressed frustration about the way that services are delivered. Rather than addressing the needs of the "whole person", services are often designed to address only limited sets of problems. A range of suggestions emerged, which focused on improving the way we deliver all of our services to youth. As a result, many of the recommendations stress improved collaboration and co-ordination across a variety of service sectors.

The Task Force recognizes the need to respond to the increasing diversity of Metro's youth population. Critical recommendations suggest measures to increase the accessibility of existing services, as well as to develop new culturally and linguistically sensitive services.

As well, youth stated quite strongly that they wanted to participate more fully in making decisions that affect them. Many of the Task Force's recommendations address this concern. Foremost among then is the recommendation that Metro Council promote youth involvement in its decision making process by establishing a Metro Youth Council.

With the completion of its report, **Looking to the Future**, the initial mandate of the Task Force is complete. This report is being submitted to Metro Council for consideration. The Task Force expects an official Metropolitan Toronto response to the report will be forthcoming in the near future.

It is not within the power of the Metropolitan Corporation to implement all the recommendations that have been made. It is therefore the intention of the Task Force to also present this report to a number of other organizations and institutions, including school boards, other levels of government, the mass media and the community. The Task Force recognizes that the support of these groups is essential to effectively implement the recommendations contained in this report. The Task Force hopes that with Metro's assistance effective partnerships can be formed to address the critical issues facing youth today.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, the Metro Youth Task Force wishes to thank the many youth who spoke out and shared their valuable insights with us. Their input was essential to completing this Report. Many of the photos contained in the Report were provided by youth – these images let us see things we might otherwise not have seen.

The Task Force would also like to acknowledge the interest and support of the community at large. The ideas, perspectives and opinions offered by parents, teachers, services workers and all who were consulted, have greatly enriched the Report. Many thanks to all of you.

Our acknowledgments would not be complete without recognizing the many community organizations and institutions, too numerous to list here, who assisted us in organizing and hosting the consultation sessions.

As Chairman, I thank my fellow Task Force members for their hard work and dedication. The many perspectives they brought to the process and their insights were critical. The organizations they are involved with must also be thanked for their support.

Finally, thanks to Staff of the Policy and Planning Division of the Community Services Department, who helped to plan and carry out the many tasks involved in the deliberations and Report of the Task Force.

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Chairman
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